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## Connecticut River Watershed Council, Inc.

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For Immediate Release

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### Connecticut River Fisheries Restoration Initiative Receives Major Award from NOAA

**Greenfield, MA** – Efforts to restore populations of migratory fish in the Connecticut River watershed have received a major boost from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Connecticut River Watershed Council (CRWC) received \$100,000 from the agency's Community-Based Restoration Program for its Connecticut River Fisheries Restoration Initiative.

"The NOAA award is an important federal contribution to the well-being of the Connecticut River," said CRWC executive director Tom Miner, "and a real validation of the community-based fisheries restoration effort that the Watershed Council has led for the past four years."

"NOAA fisheries is pleased to have established a regional partnership with the Connecticut River Watershed Council to restore fisheries habitats," said Peter Colosi, Assistant Regional Administrator for Habitat Conservation for NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA fisheries). "The combination of first-hand knowledge from the Council and local partners, and NOAA fisheries' technical expertise and funding is sure to result in successful, high priority fisheries habitat restoration throughout the Connecticut River basin."

Miner went on to say, the award will support a new, substantive piece of CRWC's overall fisheries and river restoration program. "It provides us with 'upfront' funding that we can leverage to develop and complete a number of new projects in partnership with others in the watershed interested in river restoration." The funding from NOAA marks the continued expansion of CRWC's program and the first step in a new three-year partnership. As a matching award expected to increase in subsequent years, the total value of the effort could amount to \$1.5 million over the term of the partnership.

The Council is working with federal and state agencies, communities, local conservation groups and land owners to restore and open up fish habitat in the tributaries to the Connecticut River that is blocked by the almost 1,000 dams in the watershed.

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Council River Steward David Deen, who directs the initiative, noted that CRWC and its partners are focusing on removing what he calls "deadbeat dams" – dams that no longer serve a public need. For dams that are useful economically, are an integral part of a community's character, or are historically distinctive, CRWC constructs fishways instead of removing the impediment to fish passage.

According to Miner, the Council is the only watershed association to receive a partnership award from the Community-Based Restoration Program in the Northeast. "This says a good deal about the quality of our program," he said, "since partnership funds were awarded on a very competitive basis nation wide. We are proud that for the next three years, CRWC will be able to bring NOAA funding and technical assistance to the basin, aiding local projects and communities throughout the watershed."

NOAA fisheries has provided federal support for habitat restoration projects since 1996 through its Community-Based Restoration Program, which works with community organizations to support locally-driven habitat restoration in marine, estuarine and riparian areas. NOAA-funded projects and partnerships provide strong on-the-ground habitat-restoration components that offer educational and social benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. Information on the NOAA Community-Based Restoration Program is available at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/>

The Connecticut River Watershed Council is a nonprofit membership organization that has worked since its founding in 1952 to attain a protected and vital river ecosystem. Over its 50-year history, CRWC has defended the River environment by promoting the preservation and enhancement of the watershed's natural resources. Through its Fisheries Restoration Initiative, CRWC works throughout the four-state watershed partnering with local groups and municipalities to implement community-based projects that are restoring the Valley's vital riparian habitat and river ecology. To date, CRWC has installed four fishways, helped with a number of eelways, and supported one dam removal through the Fisheries Restoration Initiative. To learn more about CRWC call (413)772-2020, email [crwc@crocker.com](mailto:crwc@crocker.com) or visit their website [www.ctriver.org](http://www.ctriver.org). For more information on the Connecticut River Fisheries Restoration Initiative contact River Steward David Deen at (802)869-2792.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### **Connecticut River Fisheries Restoration Initiative**

The Council began the Connecticut River Fisheries Restoration Initiative four years ago with the help of CT DEP fisheries biologist Steve Gephard. Tom Maloney, then CRWC's River Steward in Connecticut, worked with Gephard to plan and implement a number of fishway installations on two tributaries – Mill Brook in Old Lyme and the Eightmile River in Lyme. They carried out the legwork of determining the feasibility of each project; negotiating easements for the land and dam; organizing local partnerships to help with the projects; getting the

required permits, historical studies and engineering done; raising the funding for each fishway; and then overseeing the contractor building the fishway. Each project from feasibility to construction takes a full year to implement.

Fishway projects are a real point of pride for communities and local conservation groups. These local institutions are responsible for helping to raise funding and provide in-kind services, maintain and clean the fishways, organize fish counts to document the benefits of the projects to Connecticut River fisheries, and sponsor educational programs that involve the public in monitoring the health of their hometown river.

To help others develop fishways, the Council worked with the National Park Service to produce “A Fishway for your Stream,” a step-by-step manual based on its experience and knowledge. Copies of the manual are available from the Council for \$2.50 to cover postage and handling.

To date, the Council has installed four fishways in Connecticut and assisted with one dam removal on the Ashuelot River in New Hampshire; some of these projects received Community-Based Restoration Program funds in the past. The Council currently has a new fishway under construction in Connecticut, is planning another dam removal on the Ashuelot, has several fish and eel ways on the drawing board in Massachusetts, and serves on the Vermont and New Hampshire River Restoration Task Forces overseeing the implementation of dam removal and fishway projects in those states.

The Council has organized a four-state task force under the aegis of the Community-Based Restoration Program partnership award to identify, prioritize and target projects for funding and to integrate and share their fisheries restoration expertise for the Connecticut River watershed. The states differ enough in their approaches that the task force is helping to assure a consistent program throughout the basin.

Ultimately, the Council and state and federal partners are looking to reconnect the riverine habitat in the Connecticut River Watershed that has been fractured by dams. Dams create barriers to fish migration and cause significant water temperature increases in the reservoirs behind the dams. Both changes in the water quality are threats to all in stream life but especially to the fisheries. Many fish species that live and grow to maturity in the ocean rely on small tributary streams in order to successfully complete their life cycle. The small streams are where spawning must take place if the species are to be successful. The river restoration program is designed to reopen those vital tributaries to spawning fish. Other benefits of the program are increased numbers of fish that improve recreational and commercial fishing and an expanded food chain for birds, mammals and fish in the watershed including the American bald eagle, osprey, river otter, mink, and sea run brown trout.

For further information on the Council’s Connecticut River Fisheries Restoration Initiative contact David Deen at (802)869-2792 or [crwc@sover.net](mailto:crwc@sover.net).